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the second for the chief, who was worried by the numerous cases of illness in the village; and the third for a young man who sacrificed a fowl so that his wife might bear a child. We note that the *tídzana* is appealed to for much the same reason as the *ketsá*; let me note also that the third suppliant came of a family which 'owned' a particular medicine reputed to cure sterility, even though he himself had invoked the sacred chain instead. In his case as in all others the sacrifice had been indicated by the diviners, who are the final judges of the appropriate supernatural remedy.

I mentioned before that the Chain of Tsoede formerly also served as an ordeal of deadly efficacy and as an instrument of execution.[1] It may seem puzzling that a tool of death should be believed to restore health and fertility. Yet even as a tool of death the Chain of Tsoede is a *kuti*; indeed, it is used to kill because it has the supernatural power also to purify the executioner and sanctify the deed. And as the *kuti* is always a force, divine in origin and unspecific in nature, so it can, by definition, be made to do many things.

We may add the ritual *ndáduma* to this list of movable rites although it figures equally among the fixed ceremonials. In its movable form, it is concerned with the rise and fall of the river and is performed when the seasonal floods are late or of threatening dimensions (though not sufficiently grave to warrant the performance of the *ketsá*). The name of the ritual, 'Father Niger', refers to a whole species of spirits inhabiting various localities on the river. The most powerful of these river spirits is said to live at Bazumagi, a small village up-river from Jebba. Here the local priest performs a special version of the ceremonial, which takes place only when ordered by the *Kuta* of the Kede. In the course of this ceremonial the priest wades into the river and throws a stone ashore, the place where the stone drops being believed to show that year's highwater mark. In Jebba, the ritual is in the hands of the *Tswanya*, who sacrifices a white cock, some beer, and a little honey (a favourite food of all river spirits). I did not witness the movable ritual but only the fixed version, which is the last in the cycle of rites falling in the ninth month; it was performed on 5th December, succeeding the ritual *dzakó* by two days. The actual observance, however, is the same in both rituals, though the fixed form bears not only on the river floods, but also, more generally, on health, prosperity, and childbirth in the village. In neither case can the *ndáduma* be made to serve the private interests of individuals or

[1] See above, p. 32.—The name *tídzana* is said to mean 'head (*eti*) of Dzana', Dzana being the name of the legendary first victim of this method of execution.

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In spite of this fluidity and uniformity each *kuti* represents, for the people, a procedure possessed of a distinct and unmistakable identity. We need not mention especially certain external details marking off one ritual from another, such as the different trees in places of sacrifice otherwise closely alike, different musical instruments played with songs which themselves may be interchangeable, or one or two objects peculiar to particular ceremonials. More importantly, the person of the officiant varies from ritual to ritual, only very few sharing the same priest. We spoke of him as being 'in charge' of a ritual; the Nupe would say that he 'owns' the ritual: and for them no reference to a *kuti* is complete without the mention of this relevantly varying 'ownership'.

Now, this is a new conception of the ownership of rituals. We have met with two others—an ownership vested in the village community, as part of its corporate estate, and one vested in the whole tribe or nation, as an attribute of its collective identity. The former comes closest to 'ownership' in the conventional sense of the word, since the village community in fact views its cycle of rituals much as one does some concretely held source of benefits. In the priest's ownership of 'his' ritual this notion disappears; for he 'owns' the ritual only as a task or duty (if a privileged one), which falls to him by virtue of his descent or rank. In either case, the village community, as the true 'owner' of the ceremonial, delegates its execution to one of its segments (the priest's kin group) or to one of its individual members. This notion is in fact carried to the extreme; for neither the priest nor his family derive any particular benefits, secular or mystic, from the religious office: the priest is merely the one individual entitled and expected to exercise it 'for the whole town'. The unique priestship of the *gunnu*, which sanctifies the person of the incumbent, is only partly an exception. The priest is distinguished from other mortals only inasmuch as he is a vessel of a force working miraculously; but he is not expected to be blessed with children because he officiates in a cult of fertility nor to be better off than others because the cult also promises prosperity. Indeed, like any other person due to assume a public office, he must prove that he is 'strong enough', that is, he must first acquire the full adult status of a married man and family head.

The individual 'ownership' of ritual thus implies no special validity of the thing owned for the owner. The two forms of group ownership imply precisely this. Here 'ownership' is coterminous with validity for a group so-and-so constituted. Where this group is the society at large, the tribe or nation, that is, the widest group on which behaviour is normally oriented, the validity of the ritual also ceases at the group boundary; which is merely saying that

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Nupe religion is 'national', not 'universal'. Where the group equals the village community, the coincidence of validity and group is no longer entirely true. More precisely, the validity of the ritual holds on two different planes, both coinciding with and extending beyond the group boundaries. Thus every ritual is valid for the community which actually performs it, promising its various benefits to that congregation; and every ritual is further valid for the wider or widest group of which the congregation forms a part. This wider validity may again be of two kinds. First, the group performing the ritual may regard it as a task (a privileged task) apportioned to it within the embracing social unit, so that each performance is understood to contribute to the welfare of that unit and also affirms its existence; as we have seen, this is true of several rituals in the river area and, on the widest plane, of the rituals associated with Tsoede and the kingdom of Nupe.[1] Secondly, the community performing the ritual may merely know that other villages in the tribe or perhaps sub-tribe 'own' an identical observance; so that every performance will recall and confirm the existence of a larger human aggregate of like customs and beliefs. In the first case, then, the single village community sees itself as belonging to an embracing association in which it has a part to play; in the second, as belonging to a particular species of humanity. In either case the purely religious aims merge with notions of group existence and relationships.

2. THE PROMISE OF RITUAL

The discussion of the validity of rituals, which is bound up with the promises they hold out, leads us at once to the crucial questions—how do rituals fulfil their promise? and how do they convey the hope, or perhaps certainty, that their professed aims will in fact come true?

Consider that the rituals are being performed incessantly through the generations and have undoubtedly, at times at least, been followed by the desired results; thus there must be in existence a body of knowledge, empirical if misconstrued, bearing out the believed-in efficacy. Consider further that the fixed rituals are concerned mainly with 'ends' and 'new beginnings', that is, with the overall repetitiveness of natural life—with the cycles of the seasons, with birth, with the growing of crops, with the rise and fall of the river. This repetitiveness is well known empirically, independently of any belief in supernatural agencies. The

[1] We note the same principle of 'delegation' which also underlies Nupe priestship, though the 'privileged task' now falls, not to individuals, but to sections of the society at large or to groups within groups.